

Spiritual Conference

“CONTEMPLATIVE AND ACTIVE LIFE:

a study in proportion”

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* TEST: LUKE X: 38-42

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Description of the Place
- B. Description of the Persons

II. THE INTERIOR LIFE

- A. The Life of Christ in Us
- B. The Holy Spirit Living within Us
- C. The Life of Grace of the Holy Trinity Abiding in Men

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME

- A. Martha, the Type of the Active Life
- B. Mary, the Type of the Contemplative Life
- C. JESUS – The Perfect Example of a Union of the Two

IV. NECESSITY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE FOR THE APOSTOLATE

- A. The Success of the Apostolate

V. THE INTERIOR LIFE – THE CONDITION OF GRACE

- A. God Makes use of the Works of the Apostolate
- B. The Apostolate: a Cooperation between God and Men
- C. The Priest – the Instrument of Sanctity
- D. Interior Life of the Priest

VI. THE INFLUENCE OF THE ACTIVE UPON THE INTERIOR LIFE

- A. Active life – Possible Occasion of Dangers
- B. Difficulties to Union Not Insurmountable

VII. HOW TO UNITE AND ADAPT THE CONTEMPLATIVE AND ACTIVE STATES

- A. Care of the Body
- B. Organization of Life
- C. Avoiding Levity (Detachment)
- D. To be Aided by Others
- E. Discretion Necessary to the Apostolate
- F. Relation between Action of the Interior Life and Activity of the Apostolate
- G. The Necessity of Study for the Priest
- H. Practice of Occasional Spiritual Retreats and Ejaculatory Prayers
- I. The Interaction of Contemplative and Active States

VIII. CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus is our Friend

The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ

According to St. Luke

X: 38 – 42

NOW IT CAME TO PASS AS THEY WENT, that He entered into a certain town: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard His word. But Martha was busy about much serving. Who stood and said: Lord, have you know care that my sister has left me alone to serve? Speak to her therefore so that she help me. And the Lord, answering, said to her: Martha, Martha, you are careful, and are troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE

TITLE: Contemplative and Active Life
- A Study in Proportion -

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Description of the Place

1. BETHANY – (meaning) “House of Sadness”

- a.1. A small town, approximately two miles from Jerusalem, where our Lord frequently stopped.
- a.2. In the Theologico – literary scheme of Luke’s Gospel, a symbol of the faithful Jews who had accepted Jesus, and who would comprise the “New Jerusalem” (APOC. XXI: 2) of the Church.
- a.3. Jesus stops here with His Disciples on the way to meet His impending doom in Jerusalem; and the incident is one which portrays Him tenderly guiding the infant Church of faithful Jews. It is in direct contradistinction to the apparent anger with which He condemns “official” Judaism, represented by Jerusalem, because of their rejection of Him.

B. DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSONS

1. MARTHA – (meaning) “sadness”

- b.1. An example of the active life
 - b.b.1. The Evangelist remarks that it is she who “received Him into her house” (LUKE X: 38) and again that “Martha was busy about much serving.” (LUKE X: 39)

2. MARY – (meaning) “from the day”

- b.1. An example of the contemplative life
 - b.b.1. The Evangelist remarks that it is she “who sitting also at the Lord’s feet, heard His word.” (LUKE X: 39)

3. JESUS – the perfect example of a combination of both active and contemplative lives.

- b.1. Jesus, in His Divine Perfection as the Word of God, perfect example of both lives, e.g.:
 - b.b.1. Jesus frequently in prayer on the mountain – contemplative
 - b.b.2. Jesus curing the sick, teaching, etc. – active

II. HE INTERIOR LIFE

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the God-head corporeally.” (COL. II: 9)
“And of His Fullness we have all received.”
(JOHN I: 16)

A. The Life of Christ is us:

1. “I am the Vine; you are the branches; He that abides in me and I in him, the same bears much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing.” (JOHN XV: 5)

B. The Holy Spirit living within us:

1. “And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever: the Spirit of Truth...shall be in you.” (JOHN XIV: 16-17)

C. The life of grace of the Holy Trinity abiding in men:

1. “That all may be One, as Thou, Father, in me, and I in Thee: that they also may be one in us. (JOHN XVII: 21)

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME

A. Martha, the Type of the Active Life

1. Advantages

- a.1. Her love for Jesus manifested in her care for His comfort and the respect implied in her treatment.
- a.2. The display of virtue necessary: patience, humility, zeal, magnanimity.
- a.3. Her eagerness to work for and serve Christ by exemplifying his teachings, and offering her work for him

2. Disadvantages

- a.1. The inclination to consider the outward service the most important thing.
- a.2. The easy temptation to value the work for its own sake, rather than referring it to the service and glory of God.
- a.3. The temptation to vanity and officiousness.
- a.4. The unsettled state of mind and soul which the active state alone produces, often giving rise to envy, impatience, anxiety, etc...

B. Mary, the Type of the Contemplative Life

1. Advantages

- a.1. Mary's disposition of obedience to the Master's Will. She does not concern herself with matters beyond her duty, and realizes her place at Jesus' feet, listening to His words.
- a.2. Mary appears calm and trustful of Jesus in all things: completely disposed.
- a.3. Mary "has chosen the best part" (LUKE X: 42), because she realized that "but one thing is necessary." (IBID)
- a.4. The portion she has chosen in eternal, a foretaste of the Divine Life itself, "which shall not be taken away." (Ibid)

2. Disadvantages

- a.1. Tendency to withdraw from the legitimate duties of one's state in life.
- a.2. The tendency to pride oneself on the singular grace of contemplation – the free gift of God.
- a.3. The Contemplative Life, if not balanced by a certain activity, may be the source of psychological difficulties.

B. JESUS – the Perfect Example of Union of the Two

1. Jesus is Himself the most perfect Union of both states. Saint John expresses the Mystery of Jesus' "Fullness of the Father" in the opening chapter of His Gospel.
 - a.1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... In Him was life, and the Life was the light of men...the true light which enlightened every man that cometh into this world."
(JOHN I: 1, 4, and 9)
2. Because He is the Word of God, in persistent and intimate union with the Father, (contemplative) He is able to perform the apostolic and active labors to which the Gospels are witness.
 - a.1. "And as the rain and snow come down from heaven...soak the earth...and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower, and which shall go forth from my mouth... It shall do whatsoever I please, and prosper in the things for which I sent it." (ISAIAH IV: 10-11)
 - a.2. "He that sees Me sees the Father also... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?... But the Father who abides in Me, He does the works." (JOHN XIV: 9-11)
3. Jesus thus expresses the principle that He is only able to perform His works of the active life by reason of the strength He derives from His Contemplation and Interior Prayer.

4. Through this union, He achieves that perfect balance enabling Him to teach, to heal, to cure, to comfort – to do all things effectively because they are rooted in His interior life.

IV. NECESSITY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE FOR THE APOSTOLATE

A. The success of the Apostolate depends on two factors:

1. The Action of God; and,
2. Personal effectualness, which depends upon the following traits in the world – be Apostle: these are the fruit of a profound INTERIOR LIFE.

a.1. Conviction

a.a.1. “When the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth.”
(ECCLUS. XI: 3)

a.a.2. “He that believes in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do: and greater than these shall he do.” (JOHN XIV: 12)

- (1) One who is not himself convinced cannot convince others.
- (2) The priest himself must have the thorough experience of real faith in his own life if he would teach others to hold firmly.
- (3) The works of the Apostolate must proceed from the inner conviction of the teacher: the surface intellectualization of the charlatan without heart will not suffice.

a.2. Good Example

a.a.1. “But the path of the just, as a shining light, goes forward, and increases even to perfect day.” (PROV. IV: 18)

a.a.2. “So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (MATT. V: 16)

- (1) The proof of conviction lies in the life lived accordingly.
- (2) One cannot believe the word of whose conduct and example does not conform to their teaching.
- (3) One must therefore strive through continual recourse to interior prayer to discover one’s inadequacies, and seek to participate more fully in the Perfection of Jesus.

a.3. Resistance to the World

a.a.1. “Here, then, this day have I set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord...loving Him and walking in His ways...the Lord your God will bless you abundantly... But if you turn away your hearts...and...are led astray

and adore and serve other gods, I tell you that you will certainly perish.” (DEUT. XXX, 15-18)

a.a.2. “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world; as I also am not of the world. I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from evil.” (JOHN XVII: 14-15)

- (1) We must remain free of the world which we seek to impregnate with God’s truth, which is beyond the world.
- (2) The constant recourse to the Presence of God, and disposition to Him in all things, at all times, under every circumstance – are necessary to keep us pure from the world.
- (4) One must be constantly recharged with the grace of God through fervent converse with Him in prayer: otherwise, spiritual effectiveness in work may be lost. “You are the salt of the earth. But what if the salt shall lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?” (MATT V: 13)

a.4. Perseverance

a.a.1. “For we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never waver in their faith in Him.” (TOB. II: 18)

a.a.2. “Jesus said...No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” (LUKE IX: 62)

- (1) One must beware of the devil’s greatest weapon against the Apostolate, discouragement.
- (2) But discouragement is normal: we must overcome manaces, indifference, misunderstanding, ridicule – above all – learning to correct our own mistakes patiently.
- (3) Perseverance is only possible when we realize God’s will everywhere, even in our mistakes. Only constant prayer will help us to see all things as He sees, that we are but instruments.

a.5. Love of God and of Souls

a.a.1. “Put me as a seal upon thy heart, and as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death.” (CANT. VIII: 6)

a.a.2. “Jesus said to Simon Peter: Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him: Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him: Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.” (JOHN XXI: 15)

- (1) Without a real love for Christ we cannot love souls who are formed in His Image, nor draw them to Him.
- (2) The greater our love for God, the more we will be able to see Him in those souls we confront – no matter the defects.

- (3) We must therefore be in constant rapport with Jesus in prayer, that we may learn to see Him in every man, and love Him accordingly.

a.6. Prudence

- a.a.1. “In the heart of the prudent rests wisdom, and it shall instruct all the ignorant.” (PROV. XIV: 33)
- a.a.2. “Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be you therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.” (MATT. X: 16)
 - (1) Without the sufficient reflection that prudence engenders, our works will be fruitless and ill organized.
 - (2) All activities, must be directed by the virtue of prudence. It teaches us caution and moderation in all things, disposing them properly to each other.
 - (3) Repose of the intellect is necessary to prudence. Constance prayer will equip us with peace and tranquility whereby we may participate in the wisdom of God, Christ Himself.

V. THE INTERIOR LIFE, THE CONDITION OF GRACE

- A. God uses the works of the Apostolate as secondary means through which He fosters and matures the supernatural life engendered at Baptism.
 - B. The Apostolate is thus cooperation between both God and men.
 1. “Incline your ear and come to Me: Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting Covenant with you, the faithful mercies of David.” (ISAIAH LV: 3)
 2. “I am the true Vine; and my Father is the Husband-man. Every branch in Me that bears no fruit, He will take away: and every one that bears fruit, He will purify it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (JOHN XV: 1-2)
 - C. The apostolic priest therefore becomes the independent instrument through which the sublimely sanctifying action of God on the soul is transmitted in the Sacraments.
 1. The Unity which is Christ acting through the diversified ministry of each and every priest.
 2. However, the personal holiness achieved by their interior life remains an important factor in the life of every priest.
- c.l. In both:
- c.c.1. Ministry of the Nature “ex opera operato” because it disposes the soul of the recipient to a greater appreciation of the sacramental action as well as many actual graces

c.c.2 Ministry of the Nature “ex opere operantis” since the soul of the recipient depends directly on the real holiness of the minister due to the fervor of the latter’s interior life.

D. In turn, then, the interior life of the Priest will depend upon the firm foundation of certain condition which will dispose the soul to grace:

1. The Interior Life should establish a sense of the relation of all things to the ministry. Result: the ability to realize one’s position as an instrument by which fruit is produced in souls, and that this fruit is the work of God. He must guard against any disproportionate sense of his own value.

d.1. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your mercy, because of your truth.” (PS. IXIII: 9)

2. Related to the above, the Apostle must have a profound humility: this is the means to the perfect accomplishment of the Divine Will in the apostolate to others.

d.1. “The greater thou art, the more thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God.” (ECCLUS. III: 20)

d.2. “Because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”

(LUKE I: 47-48)

d.d.1. Humility will teach the priest his own unworthiness: the power of prayer is increased by so sublime a petition.

3. The Interior Life – the constant recourse of men to the living Presence of Jesus – must be maintained and increased.

d.1. “I set the Lord always in my sight: for He is at my right hand that I be not moved.” (PS. XV: 8)

d.2. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.” (JOHN XV: 7)

d.d.1 We cannot perform our work well unless the Vision of Jesus gives form and content to these efforts: God must support us.

4. We must learn to value and bear our suffering fruitfully.

d.1. “And though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality. Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded: because God has tried them, and found them worthy of Himself.” (WISDOM III: 4-5)

d.2. “Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.”

(II COR. IV: 10)

d.d.1. The graces received in prayer are merited in the suffering we endure.

d.d.2. In our suffering we are really united to Jesus, sharing in His saving Sacrifice on the Cross and applying it to all men.

VI. THE INFLUENCE OF THE ACTIVE UPON THE INTERIOR LIFE

- A. The active life by nature poses difficulties for the pursuit of the contemplative.
 - B. Added to natural distractions, the Apostolate itself becomes a danger of “activism”, distracting from the interior life.
 - C. However, the difficulties are not insurmountable. Such a union of contemplative and active states can only be achieved by a disciplined effort.
1. The lives of many saints exemplify this working union of contemplative and active states:
 - c.1. St Francis de Sales, St. Vincent Ferrari, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis of Assisi, and even Saint Paul.
 - c.2. Charity demanded by their state merits for them the grace of a full and fruitful interior life.
 - c.3. Strength of the inner life permitted them to pursue their activities with peace. The commune with God was maintained by constant reference in action to Him.
 2. Actual Ministry of His Priestly office provides greatest opportunity for union of contemplative and active:
 - c.1. The very ideal of the Priesthood is an ideal of that union: he prays (the Mass, the Office, the Sacraments), and he works (counseling, advising, visiting, helping, comforting).
 - c.2. In his administration of the sacraments and the Eucharist it is the priest himself who drinks most deeply from these fountains.

The Sacraments and the Mass sanctify the Priest Himself before others: like a brook which waters the shoreline before it irrigates fields and meadows.
 - c.3. From the active occasions of His ministry he may derive great strength in reflection on the life of Jesus: visiting the sick, burying the dead, soothing the troubled.
 3. The Apostolate only emphasizes the necessity of the Interior Life
 - b.1. When the purely active efforts of the most efficiently qualified priests fail, often recourse to prayer will work seeming miracles.
 - b.2. The Interior Life succeeds in giving one a depth of action otherwise impossible.
 - b.3. St. Thomas (Aquinas) says: “Action disposes to contemplation.”

VII. HOW TO UNITE AND ADAPT THE CONTEMPLATIVE AND ACTIVE STATES

A. Care of the Body

1. "Health of the soul in holiness of justice is better than gold and silver: and a sound body than immense riches." (ECCLUS. XXX: 15)
2. "We should live soberly and justly and uprightly in this world." (TITUS II: 12)
 - a.1. Our spiritual effectiveness is increased by providing for wholesome habits of health, e.g.: eating and sleeping.

B. Organization of Life

1. "My son, forget not my teaching, keep in mind my commandments: for many days and years of life, together with peace will they bring you." (PROV. IV: 1-2)
2. "These things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have affliction; but take courage, I have overcome the world." (JOHN XVI: 33)
 - b.1. It is necessary to have a regulated plan of life and abide by it: this will instill in the soul a sense of order and peace.
 - b.2. Great discretion is needed. One must strive to see the will of God really calling to prayer or action as the situation demands.
 - b.3. Real Holiness does not glory in self through exalted prayer, but seeks only the will of God, even when distraction and interruption are that will.

C. Avoiding Levity (Detachment)

1. The lips of the unwise will be telling foolish things: but the words of the wise shall be weighed in a balance. The heart of fools is in their mouth: and the mouth of wise men is in their heart." (ECCLUS. XXI: 28-29)
2. "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume...but rather, lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven." (MATT. VI: 19-20)
 - c.1. Avoidance of the distracting tenor of frivolity which disengages the peace of the soul.
 - c.2. A proper sense of the importance of each thing in its place and ordered to all else.
 - c.3. Mortification results: this is necessary to discipline the soul for the Interior Life.

D. To be Aided by Others

1. "It is good that you should uphold the just, and from him withdraw not your hand." (ECCLUS. VII: 9)
2. "As every man has received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 PET. IV: 10)

- d.1. Duties of the Priesthood, where possible, should be shared with apostolic laymen. We are therefore left free for the appropriate duties of our Sacerdotal Office of Prayer and Instruction.
- d.2. Forced to share responsibility, greater detachment and a lessening of officious pride in our vocation are the fruits of such a sharing.

E. Discretion Necessary to the Apostolate

- 1. “In all your works let the true word go before you, and steady counsel before every action.” (ECCLUS. XXXVII: 20)
- 2. “Exhort yourselves and be strong in every good work and word.” (II THESS. II: 16)
 - e.1. Care must be taken to do a few things well rather than to undertake too much without producing any fruit.
 - e.2. One’s energies and hard – won peace of soul can be easily dissipated by too much ineffectual activity.
 - e.3. We should concentrate our spiritual energies in a few effective areas.

F. Relation Between Action of the Interior Life and Activity of the Apostolate

- 1. “Hate evil and love good, and establish judgment in the gate.”(AMOS V: 15)
- 2. “And let our men also consider how to excel in good works for necessary uses: that they are not unfruitful.” (TITUS III: 14)
 - f.1. The virtues necessary for one’s state should be at the heart of the prayer of petition.
 - f.2. The two modes of life are thus united in the single intention of both loving God and serving Him.

G. The Necessity of Study for the Priest

- 1. “A wise heart which has understanding will abstain from sin, and in the works of justice he shall have success.” (ECCLUS. III: 32)
- 2. “And this I pray, that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge, and in all understanding: that you may approve the better things, that you may be sincere and without offense unto the Day of Christ.” (PHILLIP. I: 9-10)
 - g.1. Careful study disposes us to the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, which in turn prosper the ministry which is ours.
 - g.2. Matters intellectual refine the mind and discipline the spirit for the Interior Life.

H. Practice of Occasional Spiritual Exercises and Ejaculatory Prayers.

- 1. “Let nothing hinder you from praying always, and be not afraid to be justified, even unto death: for the reward of God continues forever.” (ECCLUS XVIII: 22)

2. “Watch, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man.” (LUKE XXI: 36)
 - h.1. Many little intervals throughout the day provide an opportunity for a refreshing return to the Vision of Christ abiding in the soul.
 - h.2. Frequent recourse to such prayer will bear us up in patience and charity through the labors of the day.

I. The Interaction of Contemplative and Active States

1. “For a blameless man made haste to pray for the people...and put an end to the calamity...and he overcame the disturbance, not by strength of body, nor with force of arms, but with a word he subdued him that punished them.” (WIS. XVIII: 20-22)
2. “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and power... Therefore, take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect.” (EPH. VI: 12-13)
 - i.1. The life of the priest in prayer must cooperate with the Apostolate.
 - i.2. The combined efforts of both produce an effective ministry of the office in every facet.

VIII. CONCLUSION (Discourse)

A. Jesus is our Friend

1. We should pray together with Him, in Union with Him, without ceasing.
 - a.1. “He is always living to make intercession for us.” (HEBREWS VII: 25)
2. Recall all the graces that you have received, those that have been granted through you.
 - a.1. “You have not chosen Me: but I have chosen you; and have appointed you, that you should go and bring forth fruit.” (JOHN XV: 16)
3. He has never rejected us: we can call on Him for every comfort, for all help.
 - a.1. “He that cometh to Me, I will not cast out.” (JOHN VI: 37)
4. If you seek yourself, you will find yourself, but you will find only nothingness. If you seek Jesus, you will find Him: He is all.
 - a.1. “I am the Light of the World.” (JOHN VIII: 12)
5. If we have nothing else, surrender even your faults and your mistakes to Jesus: He has loved you more than you have loved sin: He will bear you up with Himself.
 - a.1. “Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy – burdened, and I will refresh you.” (MATT. XI: 28)
6. Do not be disturbed, but thankful that Jesus permits you to help him in His work for the redemption of souls.

- a.2. “And you shall be hated by all men for My Name’s sake: but he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved.” (MATT. X: 22)
- 7. And now, go forward with confidence, for I will be with you: I shall be your reward.
 - a.1. “Let not your heart be troubled...I will not leave you orphans, but I will come to you...Amen, Amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice... So also, you now indeed have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice: and your joy no man shall take from you.” (JOHN XIV: 1, 18; XVI: 20, 22)